

# Lake Accotink Park

## Witness to History



Culverts provided shelter for soldiers and civilians waiting to sabotage passing trains during the Civil War

Located in Springfield, Virginia, Lake Accotink Park is nestled in the heart of Fairfax County. Once a rural, agrarian region, the land surrounding the park is now a bustling metropolis. Times have changed greatly since the first Americans camped here. Lake Accotink Park bore witness to many of the events that helped bring about those changes.

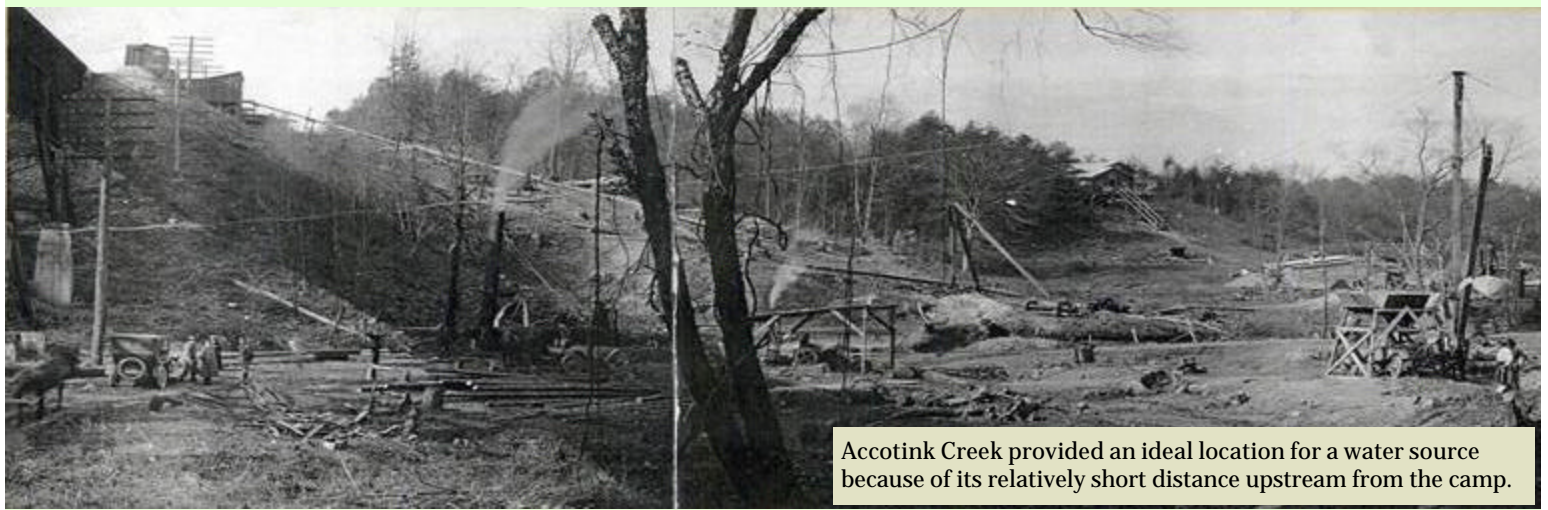
In addition to enjoying the many natural wonders that abound at Lake Accotink Park, we invite you to explore the park's rich historical heritage and to imagine what the park land would have meant to those in whose footsteps we follow.



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Accotink Creek provided an ideal location for a water source because of its relatively short distance upstream from the camp.

### Native American Inhabitants

The original inhabitants of the lands around Accotink Creek lived as semi-sedentary hunters and gatherers who moved seasonally to follow game. The river system provided them with a wealth of resources as well as a means of transportation. The waters teemed with fish and deer and other animals were drawn to its banks. Gathering and farming were also important lifeways. Early peoples were also drawn to the area due to the prolific amount of quartz and other materials from which they could make tools, including projectile points and stone scrapers.

When John Smith surveyed the lands around the Potomac River in 1608, he encountered Algonquin speaking peoples, including members of the Doeg, Piscataway, and Patowomeke tribes in this region. These tribes represented the northern boundary of the Powhatan Confederation, whose leader, Powhatan, centered his chiefdom around the James River in the tidewater region of Virginia. Because of this distance, these tribes were influenced by but not fully integrated in the Confederation. Accotink Creek was named by the English after the largest village in the area. It has an Algonquian word root meaning "at the end of the hill." Although European encounters with the first inhabitants were initially peaceful, the Native Americans were eventually pushed violently from the lands as the European population grew.

### Ravensworth Tract

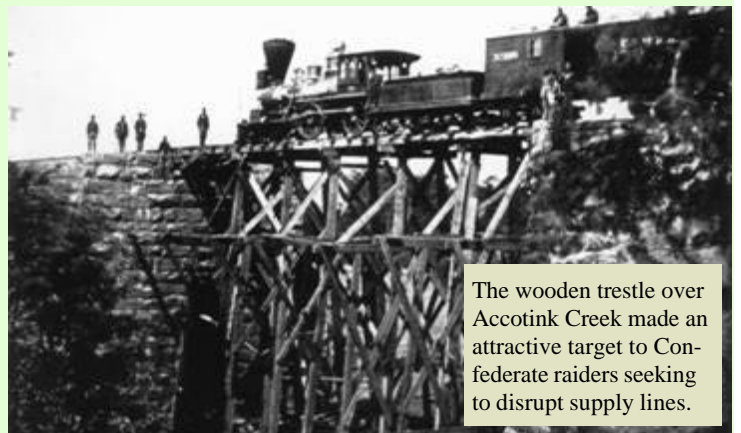
What has become Lake Accotink Park was originally part of the 22,000 acre Ravensworth Tract purchased by William Fitzhugh in 1685 from Lady Margaret Culpeper, Lord Thomas and Lady Katherine Fairfax. Like most large colonial landholders, Fitzhugh himself did not move to Virginia to claim ownership of the land. Instead, he "seated" himself on his land by establishing tenant farmers seeking cheap land. In this case, Fitzhugh seated several hundred French Huguenots fleeing from religious persecution in France. With his death in 1701, the land was divided equally between his sons William and Henry. Ravensworth Mansion was built in 1796 and originally served as a tobacco plantation.

The Fitzhughs were distantly related to the Lee family and so the Lees often visited Ravensworth. In 1829, Robert E. Lee's mother died there. When he married Mary Randolph Custis, related to the Fitzhughs through her mother's side, in 1831, the couple honeymooned at Ravensworth. By the time of the Civil War (1861-1865), Ravensworth had been converted primarily to producing wheat and corn because of the toll to-

bacco had taken on the soil. With deference to Mary Custis Lee's distant family connection to George Washington, neither the Union nor the Confederate armies harmed the mansion during fighting in the area. After Robert E. Lee's death, Mary Custis Lee moved to Ravensworth, which she had inherited. With her death there, it passed to the Lee's second son, W. H. F. Lee, in 1874. In August of 1926, arson destroyed the mansion. The land remained in the Lee family and was sold to a developer in 1957. A historical marker dedicated to Ravensworth is located adjacent to the Ravensworth Shopping Center on Port Royal Road just south of Braddock Road and west of 495.

### Orange and Alexandria Railroad Track Bed

The Lake Accotink Park access road was built on the original rail bed of the Orange and Alexandria Railroad. Chartered in 1849, the O&A was meant to connect the port city of Alexandria with the interior city of Gordonsville. This made it easier to transport imported goods from the coast and raw materials from the interior around the state. When the Civil War broke out in 1861, railroads were also used to transport troops and war materials around the state. The Union army gained control of the Fairfax Station area and the O&A early in the war, thus the O&A was able to supply the Union troops at Second Manassas. After the Civil War, the Orange and Alexandria merged with the newly bankrupt Manassas Gap to form the Virginia Midland. In 1894, it was purchased by Southern Railways and eventually became part of the Norfolk Southern line. Today, the longest continuous stretch of Orange and Alexandria Railroad in Fairfax County runs through Lake Accotink Park. The original track bed is now part of the park access road and the main trail.



The wooden trestle over Accotink Creek made an attractive target to Confederate raiders seeking to disrupt supply lines.



## Railroad Trestle

The railroad trestle was built as part of the Orange and Alexandria Railroad in 1851. Originally made of wood, it made a prime target for Confederate raiders seeking to disrupt the Union supply lines. During his 28 December 1862 raid on nearby Burke Station, JEB Stuart dispatched twelve men under the command of Fitz Lee to burn the railroad bridge over Accotink Creek. Stuart also tore up rails and cut telegraph lines before withdrawing. Burke's Station was the closest Stuart came to Washington, DC. The trestle was later rebuilt and continued carrying Union supplies for the duration of the war. In 1917 it was again rebuilt out of wrought iron and again from concrete and steel.

## Civil War Encampments

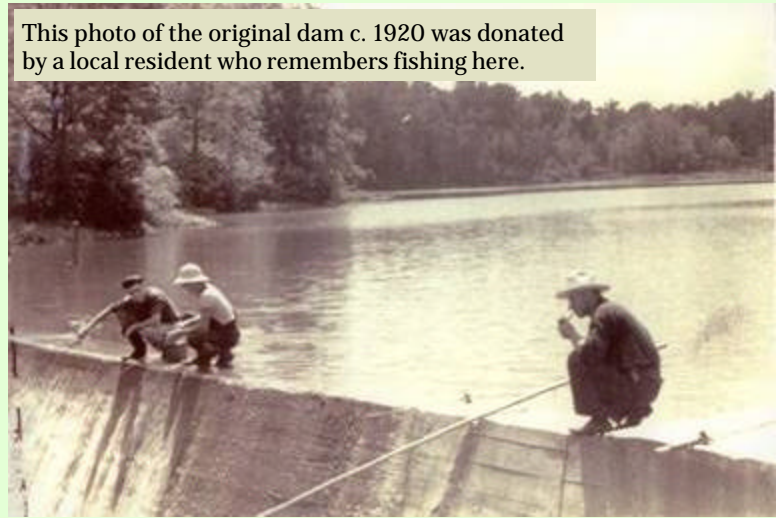
Because the O&A was an important part of the Union army's supply line in Northern Virginia, it was a prominent target for Confederate raiders including JEB Stuart's cavalry and John S. Mosby's raiders. In addition to these attacks by organized soldiers, civilians participated in night-time guerilla raids tearing up tracks and attempting to derail trains. These culverts underneath the rail bed serve as evidence of guerilla activities. These culverts provided shelter for soldiers and civilians waiting to sabotage passing trains. In response to a failed derailment attempt on 26 July 1863, Union General George G. Meade issued a proclamation calling for severe punishment to be levied against civilians interfering with railroad activity. Soldiers of the 155<sup>th</sup> New York and 4<sup>th</sup> Delaware camped on the south side of the railroad tracks in 1863 to combat these attacks on the railroad.

## The Dam

In 1912, the War Department purchased a large plot of land that had once been part of the Belvoir estate built by William Fairfax in 1741. The land was meant to serve as a summer camp and rifle range for the engineering corps stationed at nearby Washington Barracks in Washington, DC. With the outbreak of World War I, the camp was turned into a more permanent establishment and named Camp A. A. Humphreys, after Union General Andrew Atkinson Humphreys, a distinguished Civil War engineer.

With plans to permanently move the Army Corps of Engineers there in 1919, a water source was needed. Originally known as the Springfield Dam when it was first built in 1918, the structure created Lake Accotink as a safe, stable water source. The dam originally cost \$100,000 to build and was contracted to the Ambursen Construction Company. The reservoir it created covered 110 acres and was 23 feet deep. Because the dam threatened the integrity of the railroad bridge, the first dam was dismantled in 1922. In 1943, the Army Corps of Engineers rebuilt the dam for \$19,000. Due to siltation caused by storm water runoff, the lake has now shrunk to 55 acres and a depth of 3-5 feet. Today Camp A. A. Humphreys is known as Fort Belvoir.

This photo of the original dam c. 1920 was donated by a local resident who remembers fishing here.



## Carousel

The Lake Accotink carousel is the oldest carousel currently in use in Fairfax County. It is a 36-foot carousel built by the Allan Herschell Company sometime between 1937 and 1945. Originally it had three rows of ten horses, each half carved-wood and cast aluminum made earlier, sometime between 1926 and 1931. Today, missing horses have been replaced by wooden chariots. The carousel was originally part of a traveling carnival. The Fairfax County Park Authority purchased it from Fairhill Farm Antiques in 1978.

Most carousels at parks today are made from aluminum or fiberglass. Many of these have been modeled from the original hand carved horses of the golden age of carousels. Hand carved horses declined in popularity throughout the 1930s and 1940s

because new mechanized processes made it possible to "carve" horses faster than they could be made by hand. Lake Accotink Park's carousel is an example of a carousel made during this transition period as new mechanical processes became available.



The park's carousel horses are made of carved wood and cast aluminum.

## Park History

The Fairfax County Park Authority began leasing the land from the federal government in 1960. The primary public services offered were boating and concessions. Picnic areas, covered shelters, trails and a playground were added soon after. In 1965 the Park Authority purchased the land under the federal Land to Parks program for \$88,250. Today, an 18-hole miniature golf course, antique carousel, diverse classes, camps, events, and programs compliment the basic services begun in the early 1960s.



Deaths due to disease during the Civil War taught military leaders the importance of clean drinking water for their troops.